

# Getting Ready for College & Careers

**A HANDBOOK  
FOR GRADES 9 THROUGH 12**





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If you  
Can read **This,**  
  
You're  
**College**  
Material !

Inside you'll find college and career planning information, worksheets, and activities that you can complete on your own, in small classroom groups, or with family and friends. A list of vocabulary and definitions is at the end of the book.



## Getting Started

**L**ife gets more complicated as you get older. You probably noticed as you entered high school that you're being asked to do more. You have to be your own timekeeper. And adults aren't as available as when you were younger to remind you about what's important.

You may not have realized that, while you're busy with your responsibilities, your school is also changing quickly and doing more. For over 10 years, Washington schools have been working to become better. The purpose of this work, the school reform movement, is to ensure that you are as prepared as possible for life after high school.

Graduation requirements are changing. There are subjects that teachers are required to teach and that you are required to learn. And you'll have to demonstrate what you know and are able to do in order to graduate.

What you do in high school is important — more important than it was for your parents or grandparents. Your success will determine what you are able to do after you graduate. And the decisions you make now will have an impact on how successful you become.

*Getting Ready for College and Careers* can help you make those decisions. You'll find out how to meet new high school graduation requirements, research careers, and choose a college or other training opportunity. You'll also read about college testing, applications, and financial aid.

Ultimately, this book is about who you are and who you want to be. Take your time. Read it carefully. What you learn might surprise you.

## Learn for Life

**B**y now you probably know that one of the best things you can do after high school is continue your education. Higher education opens windows of opportunity. It gives you the chance to try new things, meet new people, and add to your understanding of the world.

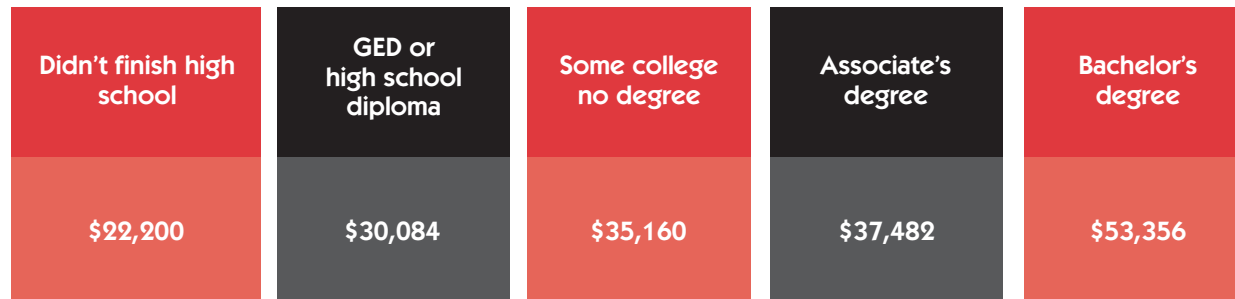
College also improves your chances of having the life and job you want. In most cases, the more education you have, the more careers and jobs you can choose from, and the more money you can earn.

Studies show that college graduates:

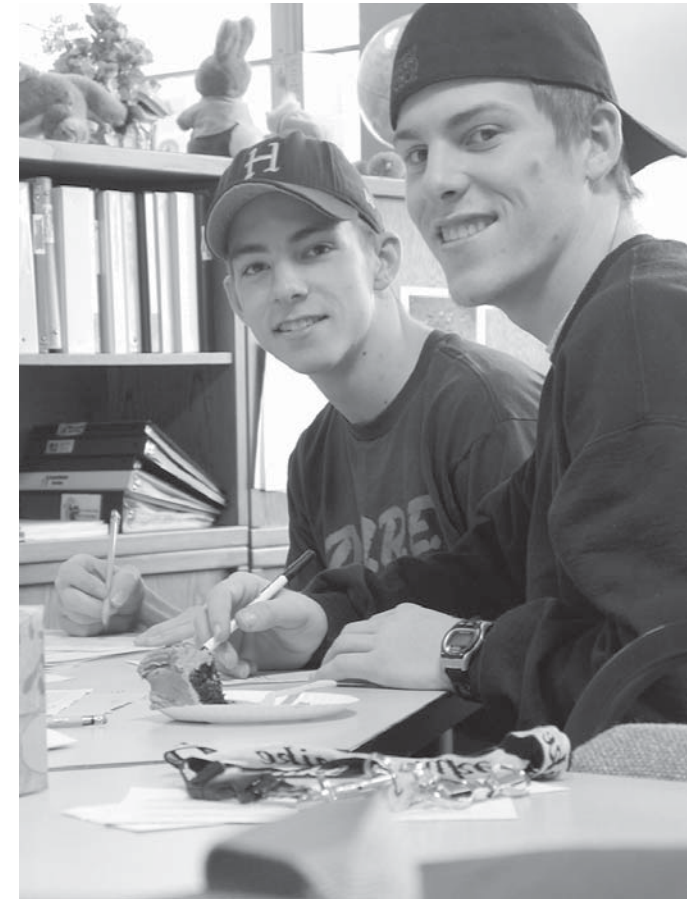
- ▶ Live longer
- ▶ Have better overall health
- ▶ Are more likely to stay employed
- ▶ Are more likely to enjoy their work
- ▶ Can change careers more easily

It is important to go on learning, growing, and building your skills no matter what job or career you choose. The workplace is changing fast. You will need to grow to keep up with all the changes. This attitude, called lifelong learning, applies to almost all jobs and careers.

Average yearly income of all workers ages 25 and up



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, June 2004.



**S**ome of you might be thinking, “I’m not sure my grades are good enough for college and my family can’t afford it.” “I make enough money now, I’ll be ok.” Or, “I want to take a break after high school. It can’t hurt.” If you think like this, it’s time to get some facts.

► **Grades and test scores do matter, but colleges look at other things too.**

Colleges don’t usually have a firm “cutoff” for grades or test scores. Some colleges only require a high school diploma or GED certificate. In most cases, colleges look at the whole you, including your transcripts, activities, family situation, and potential for success. If you take the right courses, do your best work, focus on learning, get involved in activities, and plan ahead, you can go to college.

► **College isn’t free. But financial aid helps families cover the costs.**

Colleges will expect you and your family to help pay for college, but the amount you pay is based on what you and your family can afford. When a family has done all it can, the government, colleges, and private groups offer financial aid to help.

► **Four-year colleges and universities aren’t your only college option.**

In this handbook, you will see the word “college,” but we really mean any kind of higher education. This includes any training program or school for high school graduates or people with GED certificates. Two-year colleges, voc-tech programs, and trade schools count, too. The school or program you choose will depend on your individual abilities, interests, and goals.

► **Time off after high school has benefits and risks.**

Worried that you’re not quite ready for college? Colleges don’t usually hold time off against you. They know that breaks can give you time to work, explore, and mature. Students who start college later in life are often more dedicated and serious, too.

However, you take a risk when you take time off. Some students never go back to school or find school is tougher when they return. While you’re out of school, you can forget things or slip into poor study habits. And many returning students have added responsibilities like working full-time or caring for a child. This can make it harder to focus on school.

If you’re thinking about taking a break after high school, think very carefully. A delay might be a good idea, but you could be better off starting school right away.